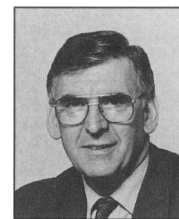


Opening Ceremony

Dr. Henrietta Campbell MB, FFPHM, FRCP
Chief Medical Officer

Tony Worthington M.P.
Minister of Health



Dr. Henrietta Campbell

Welcome to this Scientific Meeting, celebrating the Bicentenary of the Royal Victoria Hospital. The Royal Victoria Hospital may have had humble beginnings, but it now stands as one of the important landmarks of our city, held in the highest regard by the whole community as an oasis of care, compassion and feeling. All through the years of economic recession and indeed more recently, during the worst of the troubles the Royal has remained as a strong and secure presence in our physical and emotional landscape. The health service in Northern Ireland is indebted to the Royal for its leadership and skills and many of the professionals here today, including myself, owe it much.

This morning it is my responsibility to introduce the Minister for Health & Social Services, Mr. Tony Worthington.

Tony Worthington M.P.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen I am absolutely delighted to be with you to formally open this prestigious meeting which is such an integral part of the Royal's Bicentenary celebrations. The Royal Hospitals have a well earned international reputation for innovation, for research and for teaching and it owes much of its distinguished record to the work of the Royal Victoria Hospital, the senior of its four hospitals, which together form the Royal Group of Hospitals Trust. Advances in coronary care, anesthesia, intensive care and neurosurgery and for the treatment of patients suffering major trauma has kept the hospital at the forefront of treating the casualties of over 25 years of political and civil unrest.

It is no exaggeration to say that the story of the Royal Victoria Hospital is known world-wide. So this year marking the Bicentenary of the Royal Victoria has featured a fascinating range of celebratory events starting with a gala ball and Ophthalmology conference in January.

But since then people from all backgrounds and disciplines have come together at different events to

mark the unique contribution which the Royal Victoria has made to the health service, to the people of Northern Ireland for the past 200 years and Dr. Campbell referred to the fact that I have only been in this job for a few months but it takes about one day to be told about the contribution the Royal Victoria has made and the huge affection and support which it has. The events have included functions as diverse as an interdenominational service of thanksgiving in St. Anne's Cathedral, a race meeting at Down Royal Race Course, fun day for children and international fashion show here at the Waterfront Hall.

There is the new book by Professor Richard Clarke I am pleased to see tracing the history of the Royal Victoria Hospital has been published and it makes a superb memento of this year.

This scientific meeting however can fittingly be regarded as the climax of the year of celebration although it is of course by no means the final event. I think it is a very fitting occasion because by definition a scientific meeting is targeting the future.

The scientific programme with its theme of looking forward to the year 2000 starts by reviewing the last 200 years of and takes a considered view of the year 2000 and beyond, bringing speakers of international distinction, so my congratulations to Professor John Bridges, Chairman of the Bicentenary Celebratory Committee and to Dr. Julian Johnston, the main organizer of this meeting, for all their efforts in making the celebrations so successful. But I am pleased as well to see that there are some superb social activities running in conjunction with the business activities for the next few days.

Northern Ireland and the city of Belfast have a great deal to offer visitors and I would warmly encourage people go out and about and enjoy the hospitality and see the scenery. I am of course particularly pleased to see that scientific topics seem to cover a fascinating range of subjects and that all disciplines are reflected in one way or another, if I could attend only one of your sessions it would be the one, "Lies, damned lies and cost effectiveness."

There is however, a serious angle to this. The new Labour government is firmly committed to enhancing the quality and level of care provided to the population of Northern Ireland by the health service as you know we are intent on removing the internal market and its wasteful concentration on bureaucracy. We are determined also to ensure equity of access to treatment and care and have announced some initial steps on this but before too long I would hope to set out my proposals for the future shape of the health service in Northern Ireland in parallel with ministerial colleagues in Great Britain. These will be able to establish the necessary framework to ensure that the efforts of the health service are directed and delivery of strategic objective for improving the health and social well-being of the population. To see that the needs of patients and clients are paramount. That we secure the necessary money for input but equally ensure that no more resources than are necessary are devoted to management and administration.

In all of this I will want to ensure that the interests of the tax payer are protected. This involves great care in the use of the significant resources (£4.6 billion spent on health in Northern Ireland) but it also carries the objective to explore new paths of treatment and care and perhaps leave behind some which served us in the past. To find new ways of working and crucially to ensure the collective input in terms of skills and experience of professional disciplines produces a synergy which provides added benefit to those at risk or vulnerable in our society. Perhaps above all it ties in with a meeting I have later this morning where I will be putting my energies to preserving and stimulating health rather than just curing sickness. The key to this is research and the advancement of knowledge and across the NHS there is increasing emphasis on research and development, we in Northern Ireland are following suit with a creation of local research and development office headed by Professor Ingrid Allen.

But what this meeting is testimony to is the commitment of the Royal Victoria Hospital and its clinical skills over the years to broadly acknowledge and pushing back the frontiers. It is important indeed essential that this culture surrounding the Royal Victoria Hospital continues and flourishes for unless we continue to move forward in terms of knowledge and application of new technology we will be simply unable to keep pace with the demographic and social pressures that are upon us. So the government will do its best to maximize the resources available to the health service both nationally and in Northern Ireland and we will look to you increasingly to find new and better ways of harmonizing these to the benefit of those whom we serve.